

- [Rebecca] Welcome back to In My Shoes a podcast about different perspectives on shared experiences across the University of Michigan campus. My name is Rebecca Vantone, the host of this podcast. Today we're switching it up a bit. We'll still be hearing from Desi and Sam, two undergraduates who are part of the LGBTQ plus community and their experiences on code switching. However, I'll be kind of guiding you through the conversation. So let's get started.

- [Sam] My name is Sam. I'm a sophomore at the University of Michigan studying Classical Studies in philosophy. I'm gay, I grew up low income and I have a twin who is gay too, yeah.

- [Desi] Hi, I'm Desi Dakova. I'm a senior at the University of Michigan. I'm studying Chemistry and Physics. I also grew up low income and I am an asexual, cisgender woman.

- [Rebecca] They start their conversation by discussing how code switching can be necessary, both for survival, and for altering how you present yourself to succeed. You'll notice that this is a common recurring theme that we're finding throughout these episodes.

- [Desi] I think, I think that's really interesting. Like to what extent is it code switching for survival, for fitting into the situation versus just completely being uncomfortable with yourself and like changing everything about yourself to like make it through that situation.

- [Sam] Like, like I know that like not being able to walk inside an environment that I like need to do, you know, walk in and like not being able to succeed in these environments is like detrimental to like my future on like what I want to be able to like accomplish. So it's like as uncomfortable as it may be to change who I am what will be more uncomfortable is not being able to get the work done that I want to get done. Does that make sense?

- [Desi] It does.

- [Sam] It's like a give and take.

- [Desi] Yeah, I think that ties into does code switching help or hinder diversity equity and inclusion? Because like to what extent can we ask people to fit into some sort of rigid model of what their like goals and ambitions are versus do we need to bring in that diversity and make some changes to what we how we define those models?

- [Sam] So I mean, I think my answer is a little bit more cynical, but like, I think it does in a way that's bad. It was so like CSG it's all a bunch of very wealthy affluent people and they don't care about poor people and they've never done any policies that help poor people and I feel like I've been the only member helping other low income students on campus. Like knowing what some of their experiences and like my code switching allows... me code switching would allow me to be in that and then help the equity and inclusion on campus via CSG. The problem is that like wealthy people of power are never gonna, are not going to include you unless like they want to be around you and like now people like, marginalized communities need to be included so that they can have a say in the policies and be affected and they can grow and I think code switching is necessary for that. So like it's a problematically, it's necessary. Does that make sense?

- [Desi] That definitely makes sense. Like, I definitely experienced that as a woman, as a low-income student. Like I definitely want to be very agreeable and I want to fit in and I want to be wanted and I don't want to give anyone any reason to not like me or like to extrapolate like, oh because she's acting this way like

all low-income people are like this or all LGBT people are like this, I definitely feel like I'm representing the community and need to put my best foot forward.

- [Sam] Yeah.

- [Desi] Which can be problematic and it can take away from some part of myself.

- [Sam] Yeah.

- [Rebecca] In the next part of their conversation Sam asked Desi about code switching as an asexual woman within the queer community. Asexual as defined by the Human Rights Campaign is the lack of sexual attraction or desire for other people. Desi comments that this identity would be considered invisible and how she tries to otherize herself to be seen as visible within the queer community.

- [Sam] Have you noticed any code switching along those lines or within the asexual community?

- [Desi] Yeah, so I know with the LGBT community there is some gatekeeping in terms of... are asexual or aromantic people LGBT? Should they get the same resources and a lot of those arguments stem in well, you're straight passing or you don't need gay marriage. Like there's not really different resources you need which I think is completely unfair. Like the definition of LGBT is non-heterosexual and non-cisgender, non-heteroromantic. So I definitely, I think I can't get mad about it. I can't get mad and tell all LGBT people that they're, you know, that they have certain privileges that...

- [Sam] Have you ever, like, given that gatekeeping that happens and like not being included in the LGBTQ community have you ever like noticed that you might become more gay when you're around them in order to be accepted?

- [Desi] Yes, definitely. I think I try my hardest to look as gay as possible. I shaved my head. I just tried to look as queer as possible and yeah, I think to an extent it definitely makes me, I definitely feel like I need to justify my presence because a lot of people say like, oh, well asexual people are LGBT if they're also gay, which I think is unfair but I definitely feel like I have to fit in that way. I am pan romantic but I also think it's really important to acknowledge that you know, asexual people who are aromantic or heteroromantic are still LGBT. Yeah, but I definitely try to look as gay as possible.

- [Sam] I think, yeah, I've noticed I'll become much more gay when I'm around straight cis women because they love gay people. So like, I am not... I see there's a lot of tendencies that I don't have stereotypical tendencies but I do adopt them when I'm around them cause they like think it's super cool and cute and funny. So yeah, I'll become much more gay when I'm around them but then when I'm with gay men, I become much more like masc, because like in the gay community masc is the ideal level of attraction. So like gay men want to be around that, which is funny cause one would think it'd be the opposite that when I'm around straight people I'm more gay, but when I'm around gay people I'm more straight. But I think that's common with a lot of other gay men I know.

- [Desi] Yeah, I definitely, I think the one thing I tried the most is reclaiming my femininity so trying to develop some sort of like non-consumable femininity in particular like femininity that isn't appealing to a cisgender straight men and in that, like I definitely struggle with that a lot. Like I want to feel beautiful and attractive but I don't want to look consumable. Yeah, so that's something I struggle with a lot and I think my work around to it has been being very like butch and queer, but yeah, I definitely struggle with that because I still...

- [Sam] Are you comfortable with that solution?

- [Desi] I think that's my solution is looking non-consumable to cisgender straight men, but still being queer and finding beauty in that like, you know, like when you see clothing, that's like very hideous, but like there's something beautiful about it. I think that's what I'm trying to like accomplish with that. The biggest thing though, I see, as an asexual person is other people with their significant others and so I worry a lot. One of my biggest insecurities is that I won't have a partner and as a result, I will look like there's something wrong with me. Like if everyone at my age has a partner and like professionally, it's socially acceptable to bring your spouse or it looks kind of weird if you don't bring a spouse or significant other that's something I worry about a lot. I think the issue though with asexuality is that it is in an invisible identity. So I would need, if someone asked me, like, why don't you have a partner implies that like I would need to come out to justify that...

- [Sam] Would you consider like adopting a more gay identity code-switching in like a straight setting?

- [Desi] Yeah, yeah, yeah. So if I'm... if no one kind of prompts me and asked for my like true identity, then in a more gay setting I'll probably say that I'm like bisexual or something just to kind of communicate that or I'll just say queer which is a good blanket term that I really enjoy. But yeah, because I definitely find it easier to, I think, like bisexuality is definitely a little more accepted especially in women. It's not really in men but I think bisexuality is definitely more accepted so that's the term I would use if I'm unprompted.

- [Sam] Would you consider that code switching?

- [Desi] Yeah, I would definitely consider that as code switching to claim to be a different identity than my true one and I think identities are fluid and there aren't rigid definitions of them, but being true to myself like if someone asks me my identity I would share that I'm asexual and pan romantic. But yeah, that, that just goes a lot into my vulnerabilities and insecurity so I'd be a little less willing to share that like professionally in a straight environment.

- [Sam] Yeah, I just think the more I think about it the more I've had a conversation with her, the more we're having conversation is just how wide it actually is, that it's much more, it's a much more wide thing. I don't know if it's like... it's just like a human experience rather than just like these identities experience. I think it's often framed as if you're gay, you code switch if you're a person of color, you code switch, but I don't, I think some of the code switching I do is not tied to my identity.

- [Desi] Yeah, I think, I think code switching is is very human to fit into different places. Like when you, when you first meet people you act a little different than when you can unleash your personal self.

- [Sam] No one wants to see 100% Sam.

- [Sam] I've never felt the need to code switch. Like you said you have, for me, it's not like like my gay identity has never, it's never been the case where I cannot exist in an environment if I don't become more gay or less gay based on what I want, it's a choice. But on the flip side though obviously I have needed to code switch on like, how I communicate around like wealthy white people who grew up where everyone was just super nice to each other and like not saying what I think cause like in CSG, I've said none of you care about... like there was one policy that was just terrible for poor people and no one was saying anything and someone was like that doesn't matter because this is more important and like I went off on

them and that was a bad thing for me to do and I feel like there are other identities that I've had that that's been necessitated and like, I'm not going to be able to advocate for poor people in the future because of the way I chose not to code switch. It's a Philosophical school called Pragmatic Ethics which discusses how... it talked about how like groups who... when identities like, argue for why I deserve rights, that's not as successful as just acting like you deserve rights and it says that when a group is saying like, here's why I deserve this that won't be as successful as just like, I deserve this and this is what I get. I think that, that's why like, I think the gay marriage case was huge because like suddenly they had it and they were like, I'm married, this is my wife and I think that, that has such a large effect on the acceptance cause I just remember people from when I was 15 in my Mom's church group, gay is the worst thing ever and now it's like, I love Grace and Frankie. I think that case specifically, code switching is necessitated by not being visible, like what your code is so you switch to a more visible code but when things happen, like the Supreme court case, like a TV show, it makes that code visible and then you don't need to do it anymore.

- [Desi] Yeah. Yeah. I think that's definitely true. I remember a few years ago me and my little sister wanted to go to a Pride celebration in Ann Arbor and my mom was asking like if you want to be treated the same why do you need to make such a big deal out of these invisible identities? Which I thought was really interesting and I think kind of ties into that with how we want to celebrate who we are, but if like, if we acknowledge the fact that we're code switching and that there are distinct differences then we're acknowledging the fact that there's inequality and that's difficult.

- [Sam] Yeah.

- [Desi] Yeah, I think there's definitely... that ties into the intersectionality of all of our identities like a gay man who is a person of color or is trans would experience like a lot of different issues then that are not related to being gay but may be compounded by being gay.

- [Sam] Yeah.

- [Desi] So I think like code switching definitely gets very complicated when you consider the intersectionality of identities which obviously we all encompass intersectional identities.

- [Sam] Yeah.

- [Desi] Thanks for chatting with me, Sam.

- [Sam] Thank you so much for the time. This was, this was very interesting to hear like the opposite side of from this community. Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was a good conversation, I thought.

- [Desi] Yeah.

- [Rebecca] That was Desi and Sam. Thanks for listening. In our next episode, we'll hear from the producers of the podcast about their conversations and discussions surrounding code switching during the process of producing this series. Tune in next week. Thank you for listening to In My Shoes a podcast about different perspectives on shared experiences across the University of Michigan campus. In My Shoes was produced with the support from the University of Michigan Center for Academic Innovation. This episode was edited by Ellie Daftor. Find us on Spotify, Apple podcasts or SoundCloud. For updates on the most recent episodes follow us on Twitter @inmyshoes.